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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003098

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQ CONSTITUTION, TERROR; BAGHDAD

1. SUMMARY: The major themes in the daily newspapers on July 26 were the constitutional committee's preparations for the referendum and a response to Egyptian media coverage of the Sharm Al Sheikh attack. END SUMMARY.

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SELECTED COMMENTARIES

- 1A. "Constitution and the Iraqi street" (7/26)

Al-Mashriq (independent, anti coalition) published a fourth-page editorial about the constitution:

"The people are asking to have the contents of the constitution explained to them. We ask our politicians. We ask experts on constitutional law. We want to know how we will be represented by this document. What source book will the constitutional drafting committee use to write its masterpiece? All of these questions are unnecessary; we already know what is in the constitution. It is the best of us. The constitution represents the Iraqi identity. Everything that we are and want to be is in that document. We have high expectations of what the new Iraq will look like and high standards for ourselves and for the constitution.

These standards call for equality, social justice, the right of citizenship, the right of voting and nomination, freedom of speech and freedom of the media. Indeed, today's Iraq requires a constitution that must enforce a strict law to maintain the government's facilities and protect citizens' lives. It is important to hold positive and effective talks with all of Iraqi society before ratifying any constitution. For this reason, the constitutional committee must listen to all viewpoints. This will instill hope in the people of Iraq as they look forward to rebuilding a new democratic government to replace the previous dictatorial regime. To support this idea, we have to guarantee freedom of movement and security for all Iraqis as we prepare for the upcoming public elections. We have to call for the freedom to establish political parties, freedom of possession, freedom to demonstrate and hold political forums. This will serve to build a positive environment for building a new democracy. However, the best option to achieve coexistence among all nationalities and political groups is for the Iraqi people to call for unity and reject discord. We want to build a new Iraq without any interference from avaricious foreign groups."

- 1B. "Egyptian resistance and the Sharm Al-Sheik's attacks" (7/26)

Al-Ittihad (affiliated with PUK, led by Talabani) published a third-page editorial by Abdul Hadi Mahdi about terror in Iraq and the Sharm Al-Sheikh's attacks:

"The recent attack in Sharm al Sheikh has been condemned by all, from Iraqis at the highest levels of the government, all the way down to the Iraqi street. They know very well the consequences. However, what should be said about the Egyptian Media? We know that they are very qualified and well known, but as it relates to the Sharm Al Sheikh attack they are being two-faced and unbalanced. When they write about what is going on in Iraq, the car bombs, explosive belts, IEDs, assassinations, kidnappings and attacks against our infrastructure, it is generally referred to as Iraqi resistance against occupation forces, even though most Iraqi condemn these same acts. Still the talking heads and pundits from the various satellite TV stations stick to their ridiculous analysis, alienated from reality, and blame the Sharm Al Sheikh attacks on the American occupation.

The question here: What is resistance and what is terrorism? Can you tell us the criteria between the two so that it is clear? I wonder what the opinion is of the Egyptian media by the average Egyptian on the street? What would Egyptians think if the Iraqi media reported that the Sharm Al Sheikh attack was "Egyptian resistance" in response to normalization with Israel, having the Israeli flag flying in the middle of Cairo, selling Egyptian gas to Israel, or having the Israeli tourists on the Kenana land. Certainly this would be an unacceptable interpretation to our Egyptian brothers. We are comparing the two situations to call attention to the fact that the outcome of these attacks is the death of innocent people. The goal of the attackers is to intimidate the Iraqi people and target stability and peace in Iraq, Egypt and throughout the region. Our first response should be Arab unity in standing against the attackers. We should then put an end to these actions by addressing their cause and uprooting them fiercely and strongly.

KHALILZAD